

HOW INDONESIA'S SALAFI YOUTH INTERPRET PLURALIST RELIGIOUS DIALOG

(Reception analysis on Login Podcast by Habib Ja'far and Onadio Leonardo)

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Abstract

This study examines the perceptions of youth salafi toward the Login podcast hosted by Habib Ja'far and Onadio Leonardo, focusing on stylistic strategies (clickbait, colloquial language) and its narrative on tolerance. Utilizing Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, the study finds that Salafi audiences apply negotiated decoding to the podcast's stylistic elements: they acknowledge the effectiveness of modern communication formats as long as they do not undermine the sanctity of religious content. However, when the narrative shifts to tolerance and pluralism, they adopt an oppositional decoding stance, rejecting any framing that appears to dilute tauhīd and al-walā' wa-l-barā', or blur theological boundaries between Islam and other faiths. The findings highlight a dual-mode reception within Salafi audiences: modern media formats are accepted conditional on doctrinal fidelity. The implications stress the need for a balanced digital da'wah strategy—one that integrates media relevance with theological rigor. The study offers recommendations for future research directions and for crafting digital preaching frameworks that both honor Salafi sensitivities and effectively engage audiences.

Keywords: Decoding/Encoding, Podcast, Pluralist, Salafi, Tolerance

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi persepsi masyarakat Salafi, termasuk pemuda dan generasi lain terhadap podcast *Login* oleh Habib Ja'far dan Onadio Leonardo, dengan fokus pada strategi gaya (clickbait, bahasa gaul) dan narasi toleransi. Melalui pendekatan encoding/decoding Stuart Hall, ditemukan bahwa audiens bersifat negotiated decoding terhadap bentuk penyampaian: mereka menyadari efektivitas gaya komunikasi modern selama tidak menodai kesakralan konten agama. Namun, ketika narasi beralih ke tema toleransi dan pluralisme, audiens beralih ke oppositional decoding, menolak framing yang dianggap mengaburkan tauhīd dan prinsip al-walā' wa-l-barā', serta melemahkan batas teologis antara Islam dan agama lain. Temuan ini mengonfirmasi adanya dualitas dalam penerimaan Salafi terhadap konten agama digital: bersedia menerima kemasan modern, tapi tetap mengutamakan kejelasan doktrin. Implikasi penelitian ini mencakup pentingnya keseimbangan antara relevansi media digital dan integritas teologis, serta perlunya merancang strategi da'wah digital yang menghormati sensitivitas Salafi. Rekomendasi juga diberikan untuk pengembangan riset lebih lanjut dan penerapan kerangka da'wah digital yang sesuai dengan nilai-nilai Salafi.

Kata Kunci: Decoding/Encoding, Podcast, Pluralis, Salafi, Toleransi

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has significantly reshaped religious practices, particularly among youth in Indonesia. Digital media is no longer a neutral channel but a space where religious meanings are created, contested, and experienced (Campbell, 2013; Tsuria, 2021). Within this evolving landscape, platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and podcasts allow religious messages to be conveyed in formats that are more accessible and emotionally resonant often blending spiritual themes with entertainment and popular culture (Echchaibi, 2012). As a result, religious expression is increasingly mediated through tools that challenge traditional boundaries between the sacred and the secular. One prominent example is the *Login* podcast, hosted by Habib Husein Ja'far and Onadio Leonardo on Deddy Corbuzier's YouTube channel, which integrates humor, storytelling, and interfaith dialogue. Framed around the concept of *wasatiyyah* (Islamic moderation), the podcast promotes values such as tolerance, empathy, and coexistence. These values are in line with initiatives by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, which advocates for *wasatiyyah* as a national framework to counter extremism and preserve religious harmony in a diverse society (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2022; Ali-Fauzi, 2020).

Despite its widespread popularity, especially among digitally native Gen Z audiences, *Login* has drawn criticism from more conservative segments of society particularly Salafi-influenced youth. Rooted in a strict adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah, Salafism promotes doctrinal clarity and generally rejects innovations in religious practice (*bid'ah*) (Meijer, 2009; Tabroni, 2023). From this perspective, the casual tone and pluralistic message of *Login* are seen as potentially misleading, blurring important theological boundaries. This tension reflects broader debates about how Islamic discourse should be communicated in the digital age. Applying Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model (Hall, 1980), this study explores how Salafi-oriented youth decode the pluralist and moderate messages presented in *Login*. Hall's model emphasizes the active role of audiences in interpreting media texts, often negotiating or opposing the producer's intended message based on ideological positions and cultural contexts (O'Donnell, 2007). By analyzing these responses, the research aims to uncover how religious identity, authority, and media intersect in a pluralistic and digitized Indonesian society.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Cultural Studies for Communication Research

Culture, according to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, is the product of human thought and intellect, while cultivating culture involves instilling values through education and socialization to shape civilized behavior (Riris, 2022). Cultural Studies originating in 1960s Britain through the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) offers a critical lens to understand how culture, media, and power intersect (Hasanah, 2020). In communication studies, it challenges the idea that media simply transmits neutral messages. Instead, it sees media as a contested space where meanings are produced, interpreted, and reshaped by both creators and audiences (Utoyo, 2023). A key concept from this approach is Stuart Hall's Reception Theory, which argues that audiences actively decode media messages based on their social and ideological backgrounds. Hall outlines three positions: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings (Rahayuningtyas, 2024; Saputra, 2024). This framework is especially useful in analyzing how Salafi youth respond to the *Log In* podcast featuring Habib Ja'far and Onadio Leonardo. The podcast's informal yet pluralistic style invites varied interpretations, particularly among religiously conservative listeners. In the digital age, User-Generated Content like reactions and discussions highlights how youth not only consume but also reshape media narratives, embodying the participatory spirit central to Cultural Studies (Naufaldhi, 2024).

B. Encoding – Decoding as a Communication Model

Traditional communication models like Shannon and Weaver's (1949) and Lasswell's (1948) conceptualize communication as a linear, one-way process from sender to receiver (Hartine, 2024; Premiere, 2021). These models assume passive audiences and overlook the interpretive nature of media consumption in today's participatory digital environment (Himam, 2021). Stuart Hall's (1973) Encoding/Decoding model offers a more dynamic view, suggesting that media messages are encoded with dominant meanings but

decoded differently depending on the audience's ideology, culture, and experience. He outlines three decoding positions: dominant-hegemonic (acceptance), negotiated (partial agreement), and oppositional (rejection) (Fakhri Noviadhista & Dwi Prasetyo, 2019). This framework highlights audience agency and socio-cultural context in media interpretation. Hall's model is highly applicable to religious media like the *Login* podcast, where Muslim cleric Habib Ja'far and public figure Onadio Leonardo engage in inclusive dialogue. Salafi youth, grounded in strict theological views, may decode the podcast in varied ways accepting aligned content, negotiating pluralistic ideas, or rejecting opposing narratives (Adibe Nwafor & Chinasa Alegu, n.d.; Supriyatman & Nugroho, n.d.). In the digital age, where audiences actively engage through user-generated content, Hall's model helps explain how meaning is shaped, challenged, and rearticulated based on religious identity and ideology.

C. Reception Theory for Salafi's Interpretation on the Login Podcast

Stuart Hall's reception theory, particularly the encoding/decoding model, redefines media communication by emphasizing that audiences actively interpret media messages based on cultural, ideological, and experiential contexts (Hall, 1980). Rather than being passive recipients, audiences decode messages through dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional positions. This theory is useful in examining how Indonesian Salafis interpret religious content in the *Login* podcast, hosted by Habib Jafar and Onadio Leonardo. As Hall notes, language is central to identity and cultural representation, which shapes how audiences perceive media messages. Alsulami (2020) supports this by showing how language and culture interrelate in identity formation. Fuchs (2023) extends Hall's insights by discussing how ideological state apparatuses like media and education influence public consciousness. The ideological framing encoded by Habib Jafar and Onad rooted in their inclusive Islamic and cultural perspectives may challenge or conflict with the more rigid interpretations held by Salafi listeners, who then decode the content based on their doctrinal beliefs and socio-religious contexts.

The decoding process among Salafi youth is shaped by their cultural resistance to modernity and pluralistic discourse, making negotiated or oppositional readings likely. Gurkan (2023) emphasizes how audience reception is culturally and socially situated, while Rane (2022) reinforces that audiences actively create meaning rather than absorb it. In Indonesia's religiously charged context, the *Login* podcast becomes a site of ideological negotiation for Salafi listeners. Uswatun (2017), using Hall's model in a reception study of Acehese audiences toward Islamic sharia news, found that people interpret texts based on personal experiences and social background. Similarly, Husain (2024) notes that media-encoded moral values evolve as audiences confront new realities, often producing negotiated readings driven by internal tension or conflict with dominant ideologies. Thus, the *Login* podcast is not just a religious dialogue but a contested space where Salafi audiences may reaffirm, renegotiate, or resist their beliefs in response to broader cultural narratives.

D. Religious Moderation Theory Within Indonesian Salafi Movement

Religious moderation, championed by figures like Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, serves as a vital strategy for maintaining tolerance in Indonesia's diverse society. Defined as a balanced stance rejecting extremism while promoting respect across religious lines, moderation has been institutionalized to counter growing radicalism (Usman et al., 2024; Fuadi, 2024). In the digital age, moderation becomes increasingly relevant, as social media can both foster dialogue and intensify polarization. Aderus et al. (2024) argue that digital platforms, when used constructively, can promote interfaith understanding and curb the appeal of violent ideologies. Salafism, often linked to exclusivist views, presents both challenges and possibilities while some factions endorse rigid and intolerant interpretations (Tabroni, 2023; Wiktorowicz, 2006), others support peaceful reform and doctrinal discipline without extremism (Abdul Cader, 2015; Abū Rummān, 2014). This internal diversity suggests that parts of the Salafi movement can align with moderate values if approached through inclusive, context-aware interpretations. Digital media plays a crucial role in this process. Aldreabi (2024) identifies three categories of online narratives neutral education, critical debate, and hostile attacks highlighting the range of religious expression online. By applying the Islamic principle of *wasatiyyah* (moderation), digital platforms can help channel conservative discourse into respectful engagement. As Ibda et al. (2024) note, these platforms also offer opportunities for moderate Salafi voices to reinterpret their teachings in ways that support tolerance and coexistence. Ultimately, digital media can

serve as a transformative space where religious moderation is not only communicated but negotiated, reinforcing Indonesia's pluralistic and tolerant identity.

E. New Media on Religious Communication and Da'wah in Indonesia

New media has reshaped religious communication and da'wah in Indonesia, particularly among Salafi youth. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, podcasts, and Telegram now serve as key channels for interactive religious messaging. Cozin (2013) highlights that Salafi da'wah on social media is not just a digital extension of traditional lectures but a shift toward more dialogic formats that invite audience participation and ideological negotiation. Harahap (2021) also found that multimedia features on Salam TV's Instagram strengthen community bonds. Figures like Habib Ja'far create "mediated intimacy" by blending humor and spiritual authority (Fitriansyah, 2023), while traditionally strict groups such as Majlis al-Khidhir have adopted Telegram to maintain doctrinal purity in new media settings (Nurani, 2021). Fakhruddin et al. (2023) noted a process of "glocalization" in which global Salafi ideas are localized to fit urban Indonesian contexts. In the context of pluralistic da'wah, digital media has become a tool for promoting religious moderation. Sari and Putra (2023) argue that online platforms help spread content that encourages tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The *Login* podcast with Habib Ja'far and Onadio Leonardo illustrates this approach by using humor and informal dialogue to support interfaith understanding. Fauzi and Wulandari (2024) emphasize that podcasts and social media allow youth to actively shape religious meaning, making da'wah more contextual, participatory, and open to pluralism. Overall, new media expands not only the reach of Salafi da'wah but also turns it into a dynamic space for negotiating religious identity in the modern world.

F. The Role of Login YouTube Podcast in Da'wah Communication

Podcasts have become an influential medium in Indonesia's digital landscape, offering flexible, mobile-friendly formats that appeal to younger audiences. Their relaxed and interactive style makes them effective tools for digital da'wah, especially in promoting messages of tolerance and pluralism (Lin & Huang, 2024). Programs like *Login*, featuring Habib Ja'far and Onadio Leonardo, demonstrate how humor and informal dialogue can foster religious moderation. Tsuria (2021) notes that digital platforms blur boundaries between the sacred and secular, enabling inclusive interfaith conversations and creating "mediated intimacy" between preachers and listeners. Similarly, YouTube Indonesia's top digital platform with over 139 million users has become a key space for religious content. Its support for video podcasts caters to audiences seeking short yet meaningful discussions, with 77% using it for deeper topic exploration (Gracia et al., n.d.; Kantar, 2023). Together, podcasts and YouTube are transforming Islamic da'wah into a more dynamic, participatory, and pluralistic communication space.

G. History of Islam in Indonesia

The history of Islam in Indonesia is shaped by peaceful trade, cultural exchange, and gradual acculturation. Islam first entered the archipelago as early as the 7th century through Arab, Persian, and Indian traders, but widespread Islamization began in the 13th century with the rise of Islamic kingdoms like Samudera Pasai. Sufi scholars played a key role, spreading Islam through non-coercive means such as trade, marriage, and local engagement. In Java, figures like the Wali Songo integrated Islamic teachings with indigenous customs, giving rise to *Islam Nusantara* a locally rooted, inclusive form of Islam. Rituals like *kenduri* and *tahlilan* reflect this blend, fostering moderation and tolerance (Ricklefs, n.d.; Syafrizal, 2015; Setiawan et al., 2024). The Dutch colonial period spurred Islamic reform through movements like Muhammadiyah and NU, founded by Ahmad Dahlan and Hasyim Asy'ari, which aimed to modernize Islamic thought while defending religious identity. Islam also contributed to the independence struggle and supported the adoption of Pancasila as Indonesia's foundational ideology. Islamic law gained formal influence by the 13th century, especially in kingdoms like Samudera Pasai, where it was integrated into governance (Nurhidayah et al., 2024). Today, Indonesia's historically moderate Islam faces pressure from global conservative trends, particularly Middle Eastern influences, which threaten its pluralistic character (Nursyarief, 2014). Despite this, Indonesia remains a strong example of how Islam can adapt and flourish within diverse cultural and national contexts.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the complex phenomenon of digital da'wah and its influence on how Indonesian Salafi youth interpret religious dialogue. As Creswell (2010) emphasizes, qualitative research is effective for understanding nuanced, real-world issues through diverse sources of evidence. Unlike quantitative methods that focus on measurement and hypothesis testing, qualitative research prioritizes interpretation, context, and meaning-making. This approach is particularly well-suited for socially and culturally embedded topics such as online religious discourse, radical movements on social media, and ideological tensions within Islamic communication. According to Yin (2010), such phenomena often have fluid boundaries, making qualitative methods ideal for capturing their complexity. By focusing on the lived experiences and interpretations of Salafi youth, this study provides a deeper understanding of how religious messaging in the digital era shapes beliefs and identities. To ensure research credibility, this study employs source triangulation as a data validation strategy. Triangulation involves comparing information gathered from various sources such as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), personal interviews, and peer interviews to identify patterns and reduce potential bias (Sugiyono, 2018; Creswell, 2014). This method enhances the accuracy and reliability of findings by cross-verifying participant insights, observational data, and document analysis (Moleong, 2017). The use of multiple perspectives allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the Salafi youth's engagement with digital da'wah. It also ensures that the interpretations reflect the actual perceptions and ideological positions of participants, thus reinforcing the validity of the conclusions drawn from this research.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on the findings of this research, Salafi-oriented youth demonstrate a complex and critical reception of the *Login* podcast. While they appreciate the modern and relatable delivery format such as the use of casual language and popular media platforms they remain highly selective about content. For them, the medium is acceptable as long as it does not compromise Islamic orthodoxy, especially core principles such as *tauḥīd* and *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*. Although they recognize the strategic potential of digital da'wah in reaching broader audiences, they emphasize that religious messaging must retain theological clarity and avoid blurring sacred boundaries. This reflects a media-literate yet doctrinally conservative stance that prioritizes content integrity over stylistic innovation. When it comes to the substance of the podcast, particularly its emphasis on religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue, Salafi youth strongly resist such narratives. While they understand the producers' intention to promote tolerance, they perceive it as a threat to Islamic exclusivism. Their responses align with Stuart Hall's oppositional reading category, where audiences actively reject media messages that conflict with their ideological beliefs.

In this case, the podcast's pluralist discourse is seen not as inclusive, but as a form of theological dilution that could lead to confusion or misguidance, especially among less informed listeners. They are particularly concerned that relaxed theological discussions may introduce *shubuhāt* (ambiguities) that could undermine faith and religious boundaries. Despite their ideological concerns, Salafi youth take a pragmatic view of digital media techniques. Clickbait titles, casual speech, and humorous tones are not outright rejected, as long as the underlying message remains doctrinally sound. They see these methods as common tools for engaging young audiences in a digital ecosystem saturated with content. However, they remain cautious of potential misinterpretation, especially by viewers with limited religious literacy. For this reason, they do not endorse general public consumption of religious podcasts like *Login*, which they believe should be approached with scholarly oversight and theological precision. Ultimately, their reception reflects a negotiation between tradition and modernity where digital da'wah is accepted, but only under strict ideological boundaries.

DISCUSSION

This ideological backdrop underscores the importance of examining how Salafi youth decode media content like the *Login* podcast, which blends religious discourse with inclusive, often pluralist narratives. To analyze this interpretive process, Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model offers a compelling theoretical lens. According to Hall (1980), media producers encode messages with preferred meanings, often shaped by dominant cultural ideologies. However, these messages are not passively absorbed by audiences; rather, they are actively interpreted or "decoded" in ways that reflect the audience's ideological position, social experience, and cultural background (Fakhri Noviadhista & Prasetyo, 2019). Hall identifies three decoding positions: dominant-hegemonic (acceptance), negotiated (partial acceptance and reinterpretation), and oppositional (rejection and counter-reading). In the case of Indonesian Salafi youth, the decoding of the *Login* podcast often falls within the latter two categories. While some participants showed negotiated readings by appreciating the podcast's informal and accessible format, many adopted oppositional positions when encountering messages that conflicted with core Salafi beliefs particularly regarding religious tolerance and pluralism. As reflected in Sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.4, statements such as "all religions are good" or the notion that "every faith leads to truth" were firmly rejected.

These messages were seen as compromising *tauhīd* and promoting dangerous relativism, contradicting the theological principle of Islam's exclusivity. Quranic references like QS. Ali Imran [3]:19 and QS. Al-Kāfirūn were frequently invoked by participants such as Muhammad Sultan Athallah and Ibrahim Eko Veridianto to argue that tolerance should not be confused with theological equality. This reflects oppositional decoding where the audience understands the producer's intended meaning but actively resists and reinterprets it in light of their religious ideology (Hall, 1980; Rane, 2022). However, the Salafi youth did not wholly dismiss the value of interfaith engagement. Instead, they drew a sharp distinction between social tolerance (*mu'āmalah*) and theological compromise (*'aqidah*). While accepting tolerance as respectful coexistence in daily interactions, they opposed messages suggesting that all religions hold equal salvific truth. This nuanced view is consistent with Indonesia's religious moderation framework (*wasatiyyah*), which promotes harmony without requiring the dilution of core beliefs (Usman et al., 2024; Fuadi et al., 2024).

For example, Anza Zahya Qeysha acknowledged that interfaith dialogue could be beneficial for building mutual understanding but emphasized that it must not blur the absolute truth claims of Islam. This balancing act reflects a negotiated decoding, where the delivery and ethical tone of the podcast are appreciated, but its theological implications are met with caution (Saputra, 2024; Gurkan & Sertas, 2023). Ultimately, the *Login* podcast functions not as a unifying religious platform, but as a contested discursive space where Salafi youth navigate the tension between religious fidelity and modern media engagement. Although the relaxed format, humor, and storytelling methods are recognized as effective for attracting youth audiences (Lin & Huang, 2024), the content's pluralistic tone provokes resistance. As Tsuria (2021) notes, digital media often blurs the line between the sacred and profane, creating opportunities for both religious connection and dilution. Salafi youth in this study demonstrate media literacy by strategically engaging with such content accepting the format while remaining critical of the message. Their selective reception affirms Hall's encoding/decoding model and highlights how tolerance, while endorsed at a social level, remains bounded by strict theological parameters. This layered interpretation underscores the role of digital platforms not just as tools of dissemination, but as arenas for ideological contestation and identity negotiation among contemporary Indonesian Muslims (Fuchs, 2023; Aldreabi et al., 2024).

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

CONCLUSION

Following are the conclusion of this research as the result on previous chapter:

- 1) Young Indonesian Salafi Muslims understand the podcast's religious message but view it critically through their Salafi beliefs. They accept the idea of da'wah but reinterpret the content

to fit their strict theology. This shows a negotiated decoding, where they partly accept the message but adjust it based on their values

- 2) Salafi youth understand Habib Ja'far's message about interfaith tolerance but strongly reject it because it conflicts with their core beliefs, like tauḥīd and al-walā' wa-l-barā'. This reflects an oppositional decoding they get the message but reject it due to ideological differences.
- 3) Salafi youth appreciate the use of clickbait titles and casual language to reach young audiences, but only if the religious message stays clear and respectful. This shows a negotiated decoding they accept the style, but with limits based on their beliefs.
- 4) Salafi youth mostly show oppositional decoding they understand the podcast's message of inclusivity and interfaith harmony but reject it because it conflicts with their beliefs. However, they still accept some of the style or format.

SUGGESTION

Theoretically, future research should expand its scope beyond Salafi youth to include the broader Salafi community's engagement with digital da'wah platforms such as *Podcast Login*. By employing digital ethnography on platforms like YouTube and Instagram, scholars can explore how Salafi groups negotiate the tension between maintaining theological purity and adapting to contemporary media practices. A mixed-methods approach combining surveys to gauge audience tolerance for stylistic elements (e.g., clickbait, informal speech) and interviews to investigate deeper ideological responses would provide a more nuanced understanding of how digital religious content is received, adapted, or resisted. These approaches would contribute to building a more comprehensive framework for the development of digital da'wah strategies that are both media-literate and rooted in doctrinal integrity. Practically, content creators of religious podcasts should adopt a more mindful approach when designing digital da'wah content. While informal language and entertainment formats can increase accessibility and audience engagement, they must be balanced with theological clarity particularly on sensitive themes like interfaith relations, pluralism, and core Islamic doctrines such as *tauḥīd*. Collaborating with scholars from diverse Islamic traditions and clearly distinguishing between personal reflections and established teachings can help ensure content remains inclusive without compromising religious principles. With careful framing, podcasts like *Login* can serve as effective tools for promoting religious understanding while maintaining respect for doctrinal boundaries.

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